

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 NEA-10 IO-13 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-10
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FM AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9134
INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
AMEMBASSY BAMAKO
AMEMBASSY DAKAR
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY RABAT
USMISSION USUN NYK
CINCUER

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CORRECTED COPY (TEXT CORRECTED)

CINCEUR FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652:N/A
TAS: MOPS, PBOR, SS MR
SUBJECT: SAHARA WATCH: INCIDENT IN NOUADHIBOU

1. SUMMARY: AN ACCIDENTAL GRENADE EXPLOSION ON MARCH 3 IN NOUADHIBOU
STARTED A SERIES OF INCIDENTS WHICH ARE INDICATIVE OF A CERTAIN
DEGREE OF TENSION IN THAT CITY IN THE WAKE OF THE FEBRUARY 25-27
EXPLOSION AND TRAIN DERAILMENT (REFTEL). TWO FOREIGN BUSINESS-
MEN, AN EXPATRIATE TECHNICIAN AND FRENCH EMBOFF, IN SEPERATE
CONVERSATIONS GIVE SIMILAR DESCRIPTION OF MARCH 3 EVENTS. END
SUMMARY.

2. ON MARCH 3 A MUARITANIAN CIVILIAN IN THE MAIN LOCAL MARKET
WAS PLAYING WITH THE SAFETY PIN OR DETONATOR OF A HAND GERNADE
(HE APPARENTLY WAS UNFAMILIAR WITH THE DEVICE). WHEN THE GRENADE
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MECHANISM WAS TRIGGERED AND SUBSEQUENTLY DETONATED, SEVERELY
WOUNDING THE CIVILIAN, BUT APPARENTLY NOT KILLING HIM, MAURIT-
ANIANS QUICKLY GATHERED EN MASSE AROUND THE SCENE. MOROCCAN AND
MAURITANIAN TROOPS ARRIVED ON THE SCENE SOON AFTER THE EXPLOSION
AND NOT KNOWING WHAT HAD ORIGINALLY HAPPENED, AND PERHPAS
FEARFUL THAT A FURTHER INCIDENT MIGHT BE IN THE OFFING, ATTEMPTED TO
DISPERSE THE CROWD. WHEN THESE WTTTEMPTS FAILED, THEY FIRED

INTO THE AIR. THE CROWD PANICKED. MOREOVER, SOME OF THE ROUNDS FIRED INTO THE AIR ARE REPORTED TO HAVE FALLEN BACK INTO THE MARKET AREA, INJURING AN UNSPECIFIED NUMBER OF PEOPLE. (THE ROUNDS PRESUMABLY WOULD HAVE BEEN FALLING AT "NORMAL" TERMINAL VELOCITY AND WOULD NOT HAVE HAD THE HIGHER MUZZLE VELOCITY EXISTING AT THE TIME OF FIRING.) ADDITIONALLY, ONE BLACK MAURITANIAN SOLDIER IS REPORTED TO HAVE TAKEN ADVANTAGE OF THE MELEE AND SHOT AND KILLED A MOROCCAN MAURITANIAN SOLDIER WITH WHOM HE HAD BEEN ARGUING PRIOR TO THE GRENADE INCIDENT. THE BLACK SOLDIER WAS ARRESTED.

3. FOLLOWING THE GRENADE INCIDENT AND THE ROUTE OF THE CROWD, THE MOROCCAN MILITARY ELEMENTS IN THE TOWN BEGAN A HOUSE-TO-HOUSE SEARCH IN THE CENTRAL AREA FOR WEAPONS AND PERSONAL FIREARMS. THE SEARCH APPARENTLY TURNED UP A LARGE NUMBER OF PERSONALLY OWNED WEAPONS. (ACCORDING TO ONE INHABITANT OF NOUADHIBOU, THESE WEAPONS, WHILE UNREPORTED TO THE AUTHORITIES, ARE OF A MIXED VARIETY AND ARE OFTEN AS NOT NON-MILITARY IN NATURE.

THE PRESENCE IN MAURITANIAN HOMES IS NOT UNCOMMON.) THE WEAPONS WERE CONFISCATED AND THE OWNERS INTERROGATED BUT APPARENTLY NOT ARRESTED.

4. ACCORDING TO ONE BUSINESS MAN, THE FRENCH AT NOUADHIBOU HAVE TAKEN THE EVENTS OF THE PAST FEW WEEKS IN STRIDE AND REAINED CALM. THE INCIDENTS, WHILE VISIBLE TO THE FRENCH, HAVE NOT YET AFFECTED CONFIDENTIAL

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THEM DIRECTLY. HE SAID THAT IN NOUADHIBOU ITSELF, TENSIONS ARE GROWING BETWEEN MAURITANIAN AND MOROCCAN TROOPS. THE MOROCCANS FEEL THAT THE MAURITANIANS ARE NOT COMPETENT OR WELL ORGANIZED AND ARE NOT TAKING SERIOUSLY ENOUGH FEBRUARY 26 EXPLOSION IN A DISCOTHEQUE IN THE MOROCCAN HOTEL BARRACKS. SECURITY INSPECTION BY THE MILITARY ARE APPARENTLY AS IRKSOME TO THE LOCAL POPULATION AS THE INCIDENTS WHICH PRECIPITATED THE MEASURES.

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